Katharine C. Pierce

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A Report to Triennial Meeting of the Woman's Auxiliary

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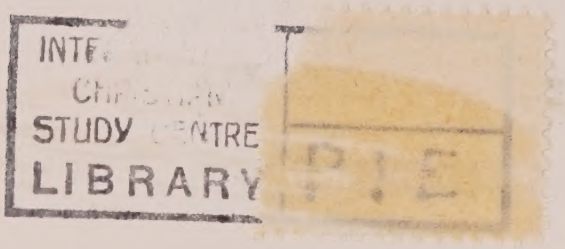

This is one of a series of addresses presented at the Triennial Meeting of

THE WOMAN'S AUXILIARY
TO THE NATIONAL COUNCIL
CINCINNATI, OHIO

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MEETING OF THE UNIVERSAL CHRISTIAN COUNCIL ON LIFE AND WORK HELD AT OXFORD

So much has been said and written about the Meeting of the Universal Christian Council on Life and Work held at Oxford during the past year, both in preparation for it and reports of it, that you are all more or less familiar with its general outlines. It will not be necessary to say much by way of introduction before reporting to you about the messages that came from it.

The subject of the Conference was Church, Community and State, and in addition to the relationship between these three subjects we also studied their bearing on the Social Order, Education and the World of Nations.

It was a solemn moment when the delegates from forty-five nations stood together for the opening prayers, realizing the weight of responsibility that rested on us and believing that our sins were in some measure responsible for the present troubles of the world. The word "Repentance" is repeated again and again in the reports. We are called to repentance as individuals and as Churches, in the sense of organized bodies of Christians. Humility and penitence were the dominant notes of the Conference. All were honestly seeking and earnestly praying for God's guidance.

We were a varied group, coming from all of the continents and the islands of the seas, and we brought with us many different types of mental approach. The point of view of women was not adequately represented, though it was a step forward to have women there at all. The proportion of women to men delegates was about one to twenty, except in the Youth Group where it was one to four. That may augur well for the future as youth recognizes the con-

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tribution women have to make to the life of the Church. This criticism is not leveled at our Church as there were two women out of the seven delegates officially appointed.

The main lines of difference in thought were the Continental point of view, with its grim conviction of sin, as contrasted with the bright hope of the Anglo-Saxons as we look beyond the Cross to the Resurrection. The delegates from the Orthodox Churches contributed their belief that the Church is heaven on earth. Another great difference in thinking was between all of the members of the Conference who have in their countries some relationship between Church and State, and the Americans whose Churches have been free for over a hundred years. These differences, instead of separating us, brought us together in an earnest attempt to understand each other.

The Conference began and ended each day with a service in St. Mary's Church. The services were simple—meditations, prayers and hymns led by men of different nations, different tongues and different Churches, but all with the deep underlying purpose of learning God's will for us. It was a very humble group that knelt in that old church. We knew we were very unworthy instruments of God's will. Penitence was the theme of most of the meditations until the last evening when it was based on the Te Deum, and we went out with hope in our hearts that we might be used of God.

We could see, even while we were in Oxford, one of the results of our prayers together, and that was that we came talking about the Churches and left talking about the Church—the ecumenical Church. That is a word we must add to our vocabulary. Some people are already using it as the new word they have been hunting for to replace "Missions."

It is important to distinguish between ecumenicity and internationalism. If we think of a circle, ecumenicity would be at the center—the universal Church reaching out to the circumference. Internationalism would correspond to a large number of separate entities trying to come together at the circumference. We must become ecumenically-minded, that is, we must stretch our thinking

even further than we recommended at our last meeting, and include the world. A chair of Ecumenics has been established at Princeton which absorbs Missions and includes World Christianity. It is to be hoped that this example will be followed.

The Program of the Conference had a familiar look. The first days were full of addresses that were intended to give us a background of information, then we divided into sections for intensive study of the five subjects and preparation of reports.

There were about eighty delegates in each section, and we were assigned to the one we chose. The one I belonged to was Section V, The Universal Church and the World of Nations. We met in the pleasant parish hall of a Presbyterian Church. Our chairman was Dr. John Mackay, President of Princeton Theological Seminary, who presided with fairness, dispatch and grace. The Secretary was Dr. William Paton, of the International Missionary Council, Editor of the *International Review of Missions,* and the Chairman of the Sub-Committee on The Church and War was Dr. Visser'T Hooft, a brilliant young leader of the World Student Christian Federation. The names of many of the members are well known to you and will indicate the importance that was attached to the report and the kind of thinking that was given to making it. The most outstanding person was, of course, the Archbishop of York. He served in the section and also on the sub-committee, giving a great deal of his time and really setting the standard not only for the section but also for all the thinking that will be done about the subjects discussed at the Conference, when he said that Jesus does not solve problems. He abolishes them. He lifts us to the place where the problem is not. Mr. Timothy Ting Fang Lew, whose belief in Peace was severely tested by the fact that his wife was in Tokyo and his only daughter within a few miles of the fighting in China while he was at the Conference, Lord Cecil, whose great interest is in the League of Nations, Canon Raven, whose books you know, Dr. Merrill of the Presbyterian Church of New York, Bishop Oldham of Albany, Mr. John Foster Dulles, the distinguished international lawyer of New York, Mr. Basil Matthews, and many others equally distin-

guished who represented fifteen or twenty different countries and many denominations, were members of Section V.

A draft report was put into our hands to read before the Conference. It was intended, as our addresses here have been, to stimulate, not to limit thinking. I think these preliminary reports met the same fate in all of the sections. They were torn to pieces and entirely rewritten. The members of the section indicated their desire to speak by sending their names to the Chairman who called on them in order. Each point was fully discussed and careful minutes kept. A small drafting committee was appointed to go over these minutes and rewrite the report from them. The new report was submitted to the section, discussed, amended and rewritten before it was made to the Plenary Session. When you think of the intellectual capacity of the members of the section and the time that was spent in preparing the reports, you will realize that what is said in them should command the attention of all Christians.

Those of us who were at Oxford believe that the reports are of vital importance, upon them the course of Christian civilization may depend. One of our concerns was to make it possible for every one to become familiar with them. Therefore, I am going to state briefly some of the conclusions that were reached, hoping that you will discuss them in your sections and make them part of our study program for the next three years. Conditions in America are different from conditions in other countries, but the obligation on us to search for truth and to right wrong is the same, no matter where we live.

The reports were accepted by the Conference with a resolution which said: "In the light we have and with the time at our disposal these reports express generally the principles for which we stand."

All of the reports emphasize the sacredness of the individual person, and the recommendations all have as their aim the abundant life that Jesus came to give each one of us.

In considering the relationship between the Church and the Community, we found another way in which we in America differ

from most other nations. We have no identity of race or folk ways. The State has preceded and produced the community which is coming into being slowly. The contrary is true in many European countries where the State has developed from the *Volk.*

The report stresses three points. The first is the sin and rebellion against God of national egotism carried in some nations to the extent of giving the Nation divine status. We are familiar with that situation under the name of the Totalitarian State. The second is a matter of which we are acutely conscious—the problem of race relations, in which we must include Anti-Semitism and must consider prayerfully what the Christian approach to the Jew should be. This was the subject of a Conference held in Vienna shortly before the Oxford Conference. It was the consensus of opinion there that we in our parishes should have a definite responsibility for evangelization among the Jews and for accepting them in our Churches when they become Christians. It was the judgment of the Conference that discriminations of race or color can have no place in the life of the Church. The third point that the report makes is a call to the Church to reëstablish contact with common life, and to each congregation to realize unity in itself as well as in the world—to give more costly concern for the under-privileged, and to be willing to undertake new and daring social experiments. This can only be done by the action of the laity where the leadership of Christian laymen and women is needed to permeate social life with Christian motives. The report ended with a call to Christian Churches to create a fellowship with one another stronger than all of the divisions which disrupt the human family.

The report on Church and State was startling to us in its earnest plea for freedom, freedom to determine its faith, to worship, to control religious education, to render Christian service, things we take for granted, the value of which we never realize because we have them, but people of some other countries look upon them as almost unattainable blessings. While we have no definite Church-State relationship, the State recognizes the importance of religion and therefore grants the Churches certain rights and protection

such as freedom and the recognition of the different denominations. This report concluded by urging that we should follow with sympathetic interest the fortunes of all victims of oppression with the intention of securing for them treatment compatible with their human personality as children of God.

The report on the Economic Order first analyzes some of the evils of the present system, such as inequality of opportunity, irresponsible power concentrated in a few hands, and wealth as the criterion of success, and then goes on to state that it is the Christian's duty to test every economic and political institution in the light of his understanding of God's will, and that as a worshiping community the Church must relate its acts of repentance and dedication to the economic order in which its members live. The Church must concern itself with the political and economic situation if it is to keep any connection with real life. At present the Church is not setting standards for society, but society is dictating standards to the Church. For instance, think of the question of hours and wages in our parishes. Do we pay our scrub-women, janitors and other employees a living wage, and how many hours do they work? Our social life must be permeated with Christian motives. The report ends on a note of hope, saying that recognizing her utter dependence on God, the Church can take courage and renew her faith.

The report on Education is long and detailed. It asks that every person shall have equal educational opportunity, that the Church shall have freedom to seek and teach truth, and makes a plea for trained leadership. The closing words are thought-provoking to the ecumenically minded:—"In considering her task we discover that frequently an impediment more serious than any restriction from without is the disunion of the Church's own forces. Where educational leaders in community and State are eager to cooperate with her, they are perplexed by the differing proposals of her various communions and embarrassed by the rivalries between them. If the Church is to discharge her teaching duty she must bring her communions into a common front on educational issues

and unite her forces in fulfilling this urgent task." These words give the answer to those who believe that education without religion is not education and who are deeply distressed by the lack of religious education in many or most of our schools.

The report on the Universal Church and the World of Nations seemed to be of greatest interest to the Conference, judging by the attention given to it, and the number of people who wished to speak to it. It states that there is ground for faith and courage in the fact that the Church is truly ecumenical because the missionary movement of the last century has made the bounds of the Christian community coëxtensive with the habitable globe. As for the international order, the report warns us that no order which can be devised by human effort can be equated with the Kingdom of God, and goes on to say that we must recognize the fact that the State is not autonomous, but is under the ultimate governance of God. We are called upon as Christians to devote ourselves to securing voluntary action of our nations to make such changes in the international order by peaceful means as are required from time to time to avoid injustice. It commends the work of the League of Nations but adds that the Church cannot leave the duty of peacemaking to political agencies. The section dealing with the Church and War was, of course, the vital part of the report. It begins with the declaration that "Wars, the occasions of war, and all situations which conceal the fact of conflict under the guise of outward peace are marks of a world to which the Church is charged to proclaim the Gospel of redemption. War involves compulsory enmity, diabolical outrage against human personality, and a wanton distortion of the truth. War is a particular demonstration of the power of sin in this world and a defiance of the righteousness of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. No justification of war must be allowed to conceal or minimize this fact." This statement was unanimously accepted.

Three attitudes toward war are set forth, because they are held by Christians seeking to know the will of God. First, there is the pacifist position, held by those who believe that war is always sin, that if we do not condemn war, the Church will die and will de-

serve to die; that pacifism is the acid test of discipleship; without it discipleship is a vain thing; that we should take risks for Peace, and that it is better to risk being wrong on Peace than being wrong on War. Next, is the position of those who believe in "just" wars—that is, wars justifiable on the basis of international law or wars waged to vindicate what they believe to be a Christian principle. And finally, the position of those who hold that no effort can end war in this world and that the State has the right to call upon the citizen to bear arms. We did not affirm that any one of these positions can be held to represent the only possible Christian attitude. But we agreed that we should denounce conditions out of which war comes and change them, and that the Christian approach to the international situation is to live such a quality of life that its by-product is Peace.

The report goes on to say that the Church must call its members to confess their share in the common guilt of mankind for the continuance of war. The Church should remind its members that the principle of unconditional supremacy of the State is incompatible with the Church's faith in Jesus Christ as its only Lord. There can be no conflict of loyalties to the Christian. Our first is always to the Kingdom of God. Allegiance to any lesser loyalty means that there can be no true world order.

The Church seeing in every man a brother for whom Christ died should pray in time of war as well as in peace not only for the nation in which God has placed it but for the enemies of that nation. During the discussion the Chairman warned us that we should only approve that point with fear and trembling and with full realization of its import. We were deeply impressed by a French pastor who said that in his church during the Great War no prayers were said for his country that were not also said for its enemies.

Certain practical steps for the abolition of war and maintenance of peace were recommended. They are: to banish racial barriers; to develop the interdependence of the Church by increasing mutual help; to labor for the removal of hindrances to religious freedom; to educate members of Churches in the meaning of mem-

bership in the Universal Church; to study the problems involved in the achievement of a better international order; to work for the limitation of armaments; to support in every way organizations now working through the Churches for peace, and to set up an adequate organization of the Churches for common ecumenical study and action.

We have been too apt to concern ourselves only with the places where our Church is at work, and have thought that the rest of the world was no affair of ours. As Christians we have been lazy and have left many things undone. We are the only agents through whom God can accomplish His purpose and we must work hard to fulfill it. There is still time for us to come out of our isolation and take our part in making this a Christian world.

One of the most important actions of the Conference was the approval of the recommendation that a committee be appointed to confer with representatives of the Conference on Faith and Order on the question of uniting the two ecumenical movements. Such a union would be a voice of non-Roman Christendom which could speak to the world and could supply what it had in the past so sorely lacked. The Archbishop of York made it clear that he meant non-Roman and not anti-Roman. The Church has suffered from the attempt to carry on in isolated departments what is really one enterprise. Work pre-supposes Faith, and Faith must express itself in Work.

At the beginning of the Conference it was announced that there would be a daily Communion Service to which all delegates "may" come. On the last day there was a special Communion Service for all who attended the Conference, the Archbishop of Canterbury being the celebrant. It was a great step forward toward a united non-Roman Christendom.

The Message from the Conference ends with these words:

"We tried during the days at Oxford to look without illusion at the chaos and disintegration of the world, the injustices of the social order, and the menace and horror of war. The world is anxious and bewildered and full of pain and fear. We are troubled

yet we do not despair. Our hope is anchored in the living God. In Christ and in the union of man with God and of man with man, which He creates, life even in the face of all these evils has a meaning. In His Name we set our hands as the servants of God and of one another to the task of proclaiming God's message of redemption, of living as His children, and to combating injustice, cruelty and hate. The Church can be of good cheer; it hears its Lord saying, 'I have overcome the world'."

Copies of this pamphlet may be obtained at five cents each from the Woman's Auxiliary, Church Missions House, 281 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

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